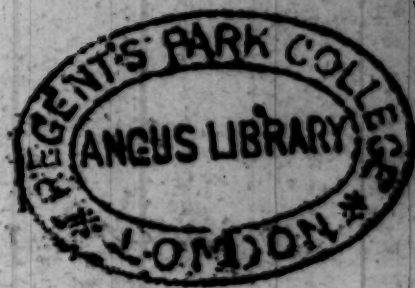


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ADDRESS



TO THE

SCOTS BAPTISTS,

RESPECTING THEIR

CHURCH GOVERNMENT, DISCIPLINE, &c.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A VINDICATION

OF

HIS OWN CHARACTER,

BY HUGH CAMERON,

FORMERLY AN ELDER OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN KIRKCALDY.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY JOHN TURNBULL, ANCHOR CLOSE, HIGH-STREET.

1806.



ADDRESS

OF

SCOTT BAPTISTS

TO THE

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

TO WHICH IS APPENDED

A NEW

OF

THE NEW

BY HUGH CAMPBELL

WITH AN APPENDIX OF THE SCOTT BAPTISTS IN 1882

LONDON:

W. B. E. & CO. 1882

ADDRESS
TO THE
SCOTS BAPTISTS, &c.

DEAR FRIENDS,

I HAVE long delayed executing my purpose of addressing you in this public manner, since I resolved upon it; after I found that no endeavours of mine could avail in making up the difference with my opponents among you. I have thus delayed, thinking that a little time might bring about some change upon the state of their minds. But I have delayed in vain. I have delayed chiefly for the advantage of mature reflection, lest I should have done any thing rashly, which afterwards I might come to wish I had not done, and with a view to prevail with myself to drop the idea altogether. I have succeeded so far in this, that I have dropped the intention I had formed of publishing my own case, thinking it rather too personal a subject; and considering it much better to leave my opponents to the lash of their own consciences; which, one time or other, they must feel.

There is, however, another subject, which has occupied my attention for a long time, of much more importance to the profession and myself

both, than many such cases as mine, and that is, the present state of your discipline. It appears to me, that there are some glaring defects in this quarter, which others either do not observe, or do not chuse to point out to you; yet, if not checked, it is impossible to say where the evil might land you. I have, therefore, thought it incumbent on me to warn you of them; and though I will not say but this design might have been executed more to the purpose by others, yet I am sure, none could have undertaken it with a better intention than I have.

I know you have often heard, through my opponents, how much I am prejudiced against you and the profession; I know also the improvement which will be made of this argument against my Address, yet it does not move me, because I know the state of my own mind, and can say, it is not as they represent it. I could say many things to convince you, that, though I am seriously offended at a few among you, yet I am not, nor never could be offended at the churches nor the profession. I never had any cause of offence against them, neither did either of them contribute to my affliction. I still hold the profession to be my own as much as ever; the churches I hold to be the churches of Christ; and upon what principle, then, could I be supposed to be an enemy to my own profession, and professing people, to whom I wish all manner of prosperity? I leave those who assert such a contradiction to explain it; and to prove, that their opposition to me is not the effect of that prejudice which they attribute to me.

Besides, in executing this design, I do not found the trumpet of a party; I stand upon the

basis of the principles you hold, and profess to the world. I advance no new doctrine, nor any cause of division, or foundation of party scheme; and, therefore, what I have to say cannot be opposed to the peace of the churches, nor the interests of the profession, whatever may be the use that may be made of it by designing men, or men of a divisive spirit. All I propose is, a simple reform in respect to certain claims and practices, which, in fact, are opposite to the principles of the profession, and the removal of which must be of essential service to the churches, and therefore it must be the duty and interest of all of you to promote it; in which case, there can be no strife nor division.

The churches cannot surely maintain, that at no time is it possible for them to degenerate, and to require a reform in respect to things, which may *creep in* among them. If not, they must also admit, that a reform cannot be effected but in consequence of the existing evils being exposed, and that they must be so exposed by some person, in order to be removed; and also, that he who does so expose evils which ought to be removed, does the churches and the profession an important service. This, then, is the task I have undertaken for the advantage of the profession only. I have kept my own case out of the question as far as is consistent with my other designs, in order to give place to a duty of more importance; and whatever the churches may think, or say respecting it, I am satisfied in this, that I have done my duty, and only intreat them to do theirs, by holding fast *the traditions* they have received from the apostles.

Before I state the things objected to, I shall

first state the principles of the churches to which they are opposed. The principles of the churches in respect to government and discipline, stand thus: *That the power of order and discipline belongs to the church itself, with its elders and deacons, and not to its elders as such, nor to any particular description of its members.*

There can be no difference between us on this point—That the above is a summary of the scripture doctrine of congregational church government, and that it distinguishes the churches of Christ from those who place the power of discipline in the hands of their rulers; and being thus agreed as to the foundation principles, we can hardly differ as to what follows, as all of which goes to the support of that important doctrine. Let this doctrine, then, be properly attended to, That the church alone has the management and power of discipline; and it must follow, that the elderhip has no more power, nor preference in respect to discipline, than the other members of the church have. It must also follow, that in private, or apart from the church, the elders have no power whatever, nor management in respect to discipline; because, for elders to have any power or preference in respect to discipline in the church, would be to give up our first principle, that the power and management of discipline belongs to the church itself, not to its elders as such, but to them in common with the other members; and it would be throwing it aside altogether to say, that the elders as such have any power respecting discipline privately, or apart from the church; and would be, to establish the opposite principle, *that the power of discipline belongs to the elders as such, not to the church itself.*

It also follows, that the power of discipline cannot be divided between the church and its elders; for according to such a plan, the power of discipline could not be said either to belong to the church, or to its elders as such, but to both; whereas, by the scripture rule, the power of discipline belongs wholly, and exclusively, to the church itself.

Having thus stated the principles of the churches as to the power of discipline, with the necessary consequences arising from them, all of you will at once perceive, that things among you are not, at present, as they ought to be, in respect to the power possessed by your elders in matters of discipline. You see, that according to your own opinion, they ought to have no power as elders, but what belongs to them in common with the other members of the church. But is this really the case as to your eldership? Very far from it indeed; for it is come to that pitch among you, that you can speak of *the authority of the elders*, and *the want of due submission to them* on that ground, as a thing established in the churches; whereas, according to your principles, the elders can have no authority, except to teach, watch, and preach the gospel, which they ought to do with all authority; but, in respect to discipline, they have no authority, except in common with the members, nor any submission due to them in that respect.

Perhaps it will be said here, that "elders ought to rule, being called, *Them who rule over you*; and *the elders that rule well*." To rule, in these passages, is rendered on the margin of some bibles, *to guide*; remember them who are your guides, and is so understood by the churches themselves, and

therefore cannot mean, that elders are to use, or possess an authority or power over the churches, *as the Gentiles do* ; but, that the elders should *lead* the churches, or *guide* them both in doctrine, example, and discipline. But this leading implies no power nor preference over the churches in discipline ; on the contrary, the power belongs to the churches themselves, and of course, the preference too, over their elders in that respect. As to the word *guide*, or *lead*, it can only mean in respect to the management of discipline, that the elders are to officiate as presidents, whose office is to keep order in the discussion ; to call evidence and explain facts, circumstances and cases ; and to state the question for decision, and call the voice of the church to decide the case ; and when a division happens, to endeavour as far as possible, to satisfy the declining party. This is to lead the church in discipline as *presbyters*, or presidents, which is to serve the churches in place of ruling over them, or having authority.

Your elderships, however, are not satisfied with merely leading the churches ; they have also introduced a plan, by which they lead the judgment of the churches, which is, in fact, to rule over them, and for the elders to have the power of discipline into their own hands ; I mean the plan of giving their own judgment first, upon every case, before calling the judgment of the church. Now, this is to lead the judgment of the church, by setting that of the elders *as a standard* before them. Besides, this plan prejudices the case in the minds of the church, and prevents the free and impartial expression of their own opinions, by apprising them of the opinion of their elders, from whom they would not chuse to differ

if possible. In this view, and from the deference due to the opinion of elders, and from the consideration of the danger of differing from them in such cases, the elders' opinions tend mightily to restrain the freedom which is necessary for a just decision, and to over-awe the church, and lead them to express the elders' opinion in place of their own; and who will say that this has not often been the case under this plan? When we consider the vast importance of the decisions of the churches in those cases, where the dearest interests, and most valuable privileges of the members are at issue; and, above all, the awful responsibility every member of the church is under to judge in them *righteously*, and from his own personal knowledge and conviction, as he shall answer at the great day of accounts—I say, considering these things, what a serious thing must it be to hamper, restrain, over-awe, or lead a church's judgment, and thus occasion them to hesitate or stumble in judgment, or to give a partial vote? Or what idea can we have of a church of Jesus Christ, when proceeding in such an important affair with a *human standard* set before them; for what is it but the *private opinion* of their elders, with the sanction of *their human authority*. How astonishing is it, that among you congregationalists, a mere *private opinion* (because it is the opinion of an elder) should obtain that important and decided preference, which only belongs to the judgment of the church itself, which, because the church itself is *the judge*, (not the elders,) ought to be first heard. And the presidents have no right, by office, to give their opinions at all, unless a division take place, or they themselves should differ in opinion from the

church ; in either of which cases their duty is plain.

I have thus laid open to your consideration one point I consider to be amiss among you, and retained in opposition to your professed principles ; and I consider the fact to be so self-evident, that I need not insist. I shall only observe farther, the danger of allowing such a plan as this, in some particular cases, (and these are not impossible,) where the eldership of a church might have a particular object in view, which they wished to carry their own way ; what an easy matter would it be for them who had it thus in their power, to cramp, restrain, and over-awe the church in judging, or even a part of them. I say, in such circumstances, and invested with such powers, what an easy matter would it be to carry any object they should think proper ? Think for instance of Diotrephes, *who cast the brethren out of the church*, even before the eyes of the apostles, when he thought proper. And do you think that your elders are infallible, or that their successors will be as much so as they are ? Beware, then, of trusting fallible men with a power or influence which they may abuse, for this is both laying a temptation before them, and betraying your own trust.

I beg of you to notice here, that by any thing I have said above, or may afterwards have to observe respecting the power of elders, that I mean no reflections against their persons, nor their conduct as Christians. My design is to expose the practices, which, though sanctioned by usage, are inconsistent with your principles. I do not mean to blame the elders for those practices, since they have not refused to give them up, and I suppose

most of the present elders have adopted them as they found them, without enquiring into their nature and tendency.

I must observe again, in respect to my supposing that elders might have a particular object in view, which they might wish to carry ; that I hope the elders have more good sense than to take this supposition amiss, since it cannot be denied that the thing is very possible ; nay, may have often happened under the present plan. The fact is, that it is evident from the very nature of their situation as elders, that partiality, and a love of pre-eminence or power, are the two evils into which they are most likely to fall. Hence, they are exhorted *to do nothing by partiality or preferring one before another*, which plainly supposes danger from that quarter. On this account, it is positively necessary, that no degree of power should remain in their hands, and that no opportunity should be given them of that nature, lest at any time they should fall under the temptation.

Again, if we consider the nature of discipline itself, what is it but a party question, where jealousy is on the alert, and every unfavourable circumstance appears to the parties to be a proof of design ; and where it is well known to be a difficult thing for the managers not to favour one party more than the other. In such circumstances, how necessary is it, that every point of order and form in the process should be observed most scrupulously, that no ground should be left for suspicion to rest upon. But how can this be the case, when the parties observe the established order of discipline so far inverted as that the elders lead the church's judgment, by setting their own

before, and pressing it upon the church with emphatical arguments, and thus restraining the freedom of the church's opinion, influencing and over-awing it. In such a case, if the party, whose case is judged in this manner, has reason to think that the elders or any of them, were not so well disposed to him, what must be his feelings and opinion? or upon what possible ground could he be blamed for them? nay, would he not be considered as insensible if he did not so think and feel? and how does such procedure as this accord with the genius of a Christian church, where the utmost simplicity, freedom, and candour should prevail?

Another branch of power which the elders maintain over the churches is, the management they have assumed in all cases of discussion before they are laid before the church. In this stage every case undergoes a discussion before the elders; by which means their opinions are formed upon its merits before a fair trial commences in the church; hence the elders go to the church and conduct the trial there, with a *prejudiced state of mind*. And when we connect with this, their leading the church's judgment by setting their own prepossessed judgment before them as a pattern; their pressing it upon them with their several emphatical speeches, and by their presence and authority, over-awing the church into the same mind; may we not conclude, that the decision is often formed before the trial commences, and that it is the elders who have the power of discipline?

Besides, this discussion of discipline by the elders, before trial in the church is *private*, and may therefore be used as an instrument in their

hands, to turn the tide of discipline as it suits them (if so disposed,) and we have already stated, that such temptations may often occur.

In this private corner what is there to prevent the elders, by mutual concurrence, to employ a variety of devices and manœuvres to bring things to the point they want, and for this end, to protract the time of bringing cases to the church, till they have founded the minds of leading members, if they cannot find means to prevent such cases from coming to the church at all; are such proceedings comely in a Christian church? I have only stated these *things* as *occurrences* which are very possible in circumstances where elders have a power to discuss discipline *privately, and apart from the church*, though at the same time, I do not hesitate to say, that such things may often have happened, and that I have some cases in my eye, which I consider of that nature, and which have been the causes of much mischief, and reproach to the profession. That, however, is not the question at present, but it is this, Ought the elders of a Christian church to have such a management of discipline *privately, and apart from the church*, as would argue, that they, as elders, have a particular management and power over that department more than other members, and as puts it in their power to use influence and other means, to effect their own party purposes? No, surely such a private council and discussion are quite inconsistent with the principles and constitution of the churches of Christ, who ought to manage their own affairs, and in direct violation of the rule of Christian discipline, which says, *If he will not bear them* (the one or two more) *tell it to the church*. It is plain that the above

rule makes it the express duty of the offended party, with the one or two more brethren called to his assistance in private, to lay the case before the church themselves, without ever consulting the elders, saying, *tell it to the church*. But according to the new plan it should read, *tell it to the elders*, which in fact would be, to make *the elders the church*, and this, in effect, it does.

It is in vain for them to plead here, that the cases only come before them in order to be arranged, and that they may properly understand them in order to state them plainly to the church; for who made it any part of the duty of elders thus to arrange and report to the church, unless it were cases in which they themselves were a party?---None; on the contrary, this is the express duty of the offended party, and the one or two more, *to tell it to the church*; and upon no pretence must the elders take their office into their own hands. Neither ought the members to call elders in place of brethren, to be *the one or two more*; because, according to our Lord's rule, the one or two more must be of the same description with those already concerned, viz. brethren. This all of you know to be the case, though you may think elders are better calculated for that purpose, and therefore generally call some of them; but you should recollect, that in so thinking, you prefer your own opinion to that of the Law-giver; and doubtless, the reason why you so think and act is, because you do not, like him, foresee the evils attending such a plan. All of you are convinced that it were as easy for Christ to have committed the whole management of discipline to the elders, as to have committed it to the church, (and in that case, discipline would

have been attended with much less trouble,) if he had not had some very important reason for what he did. And what can we suppose such reason to be, but that in the hands of the few, having influence and power, discipline would be exposed to partial dealing, and would be made use of to promote party purposes. Now the churches have no other means to prevent such abuses, but by holding the elders in their own place, and holding fast the rule of Christian discipline in its genuine sense and primitive state. This is the only security a church can have for their Christian liberty, and their privileges as the subjects of Christ's kingdom; and if once they allow the rule of discipline to be invaded by their elders, they may bid farewell to their high privileges. Much less ought churches to be the means of putting those rights into the power of their elders themselves, by employing them in those duties which Christ has bound upon themselves, that is, to conduct their private discipline themselves, and report it to the church.

Should it be said that the brethren in general have not gifts sufficient for the task, it is enough to say in answer, that the law of Christ has judged their capacities equal to the task, by appointing it to be their duty; and if at any time they should be deficient, it is the church's, not the elders' duty, to assist them when the case comes before them.

Besides the forementioned evils attending this new plan, it introduces disorder into the scheme of Christian discipline. I have already stated one of these disorders, and that is, that it brings the elders into the management of private discipline, which, by Christ's rule, is entirely allotted to the

members, except where the elders, or any of them, may be a party in any particular case; for then they cannot avoid it.

Another disorder or violation of the rule of discipline it introduces is, that it makes discipline to require an additional step or stage of discussion, more than the rule admits of. Thus, according to the rule, it only requires three steps to bring every case to a regular conclusion; First, by the original parties: Secondly, before the one or two more: And, thirdly, before the church. But according to this plan, the third step is to tell it to the elders, and the addition or fourth step is, the elders laying it before the church. It is quite impossible that such evident contradiction to the law of Christ should not be attended with very serious consequences indeed, beside the additional trouble it must occasion to the elders and members, and the waste of time to both. This increase of trouble at present is such, that the management of discipline has become a great, if not the greatest, and most laborious part of the elder's work; for there are very few cases indeed, which happen, either public or private, in which they have not a hand, and, in many cases, several long and tedious federunts, so that it is next to a miracle how they can attend their other avocations; yet according to Christ's rule, this time and labour answer no good purpose, which might not as well be attained by the one or two more, or the church itself; but is evidently disorderly, and liable to many glaring abuses. It is always a ground of strong and unanswerable objections, and a source of disagreeable suspicions.

I come now to a third branch of power possessed by the elders over the churches, and it is

exercised chiefly over that *unhappy class of men*, of whom I am one, viz. those separated from your communion. This power consists in the elders keeping them back from hearing their causes in the church, till they are satisfied with them in every respect; and for the exercise of this power they do not at all account to the churches.

I do freely confess to you, my friends, that it was the exercise of this power by the elders upon myself, which opened my understanding to discern the evils attending the present state of your discipline, which I now see, was from first to last, the cause of my present distressed situation. I naturally apprehended, that as the system was capable of so many various abuses, to which there exist as many temptations, it might become the cause of similar injury and distress to others; I therefore for this cause, as well as for the good of the profession, resolved to expose it to you, in order that you might remove that undue power, and recal your liberty while it can be done consistently with the safety of the churches, and before any of you shall know its evil from experience.

Since I have said this much about my own affairs, I will ask your opinion upon this question; Suppose the discipline of a Christian church to be pure and impartial, could I have been, in a manner free to leave the church for the sake of peace, at a period when it was not in the power of my opponents to state an offence against me? Leaving the answer with you, I shall only add, that about twelve months after I had thus foolishly left the church, I went to the elders who were my former opponents, and acknowledged the evil of having left the church of my own accord, without waiting the issue of the trial.

I also confessed the evil of the angry temper that was excited in me at the time ; which was all I could confess according to truth. I likewise proposed to bury our difference, though I considered myself as having a right to have the former conduct of my opponents examined before the church. This I proposed to drop entirely ; but all would not do, and so my application was rejected, and will be, it seems, until I acknowledge that the usage I got from them was right, and thus become a liar ; for, as for them, they told me, *they had nothing to confess*. I suppose my opponents will not deny but the above is a true state of the case ; if they should not, I am willing to advance proof before the church, if allowed.

This being the case, then, let us now inquire if elders as such have a power, according to your principles, thus to keep me back from the church as they now do ? Or if they, as such, have power from Christ to keep any inquirer back, let his case be what it will ? for I do not suppose that my case is the only case of this nature, which may have happened.

I have already stated your principles on this head to be, that the power of discipline belongs to the church itself, not to its elders as such. But if this power belongs solely to the church, as you must confess, and do profess to the world, it is evident it cannot belong to your elders to exercise it ; neither dare you, without abusing this sacred trust, depute it to, or allow them to exercise it for you. You know what your opinion is of these presbyterians, &c. who depute others to act for them in religious matters in their judicatories ; and what will such persons think of you now, when you can allow your elders to exercise

that power which belongs to you, without so much as enquiring after the use they have made of it. Will they not think you very inconsistent indeed ; and justly too, since you have not only allowed your elders that power, but also by so doing, have left the religious privileges of the above class at the mercy of your elders, as if, after their separation from you, they were not entitled to the common forms of justice.

Were it necessary to try the merits of this question by another rule, let us put it to the test of your own practice. You do not, for instance, give your elders power to admit into, and to put away members from the church ; no, you would spurn at the idea with abhorrence. Yet this would be no more than the exercise of the same power which you allow your elders to employ for you in keeping persons back from a fair trial in the churches ; for doubtless it must be, that that power which can say to one, *keep back*, must be the same power which can say to another, *come in*, and to a third, *go out* ; consequently, in keeping back from the churches, your elders exercise the whole power of the churches ; and, in order to be consistent, you must either empower the elders to exercise this power in all cases, and thus give up your principles as churches of Christ, or say with me, that the possession and exercise of this power by the elders in any case, is a lording it over conscience, and a total violation of all the principles of Christian discipline. But there is something so shockingly mean and cowardly in the elders being allowed this power in some cases, and not in all, that it is amazing your minds do not abhor it ; for to any other than yourselves it must appear as if you debased both your power

and elders, by employing them to transact a business which could not be effected as you wanted by the forms of an open and fair trial. Therefore, it must be smuggled in this *private corner*, from whence there is neither a report nor an appeal ! Oh, how unlike your glorious principles of simplicity, justice, and freedom ; and with what confidence shall you, while such a system remains among you, condemn a provincial synod, or a secret inquisition ?

It were needless here to amplify upon the abuses and oppressions which may be committed in this *private corner*, screened from inquiry, and where the greatest temptations present, arising from former grudges and prejudices, and where the pleas of *expedience*, (a shame to Christians,) and the danger of the church, cover all deformities. The fact is, that abuses and oppressions are the only effects which could be expected to follow from such an evident violation of professed principles. I shall only mention one case which cannot be disputed. When I was brought into this private court, it was before my accusers, who thus became my judges ; all that was precious to me was in their power, my liberty, and religious privileges ; there were none to oppose them nor to make a fair report ; and, moreover, my being admitted to the church might have brought these my opponents to serious inquiry and trouble, in consequence of their former conduct to me. In such circumstances, what sort of decision could be expected, but that which took place, viz. that I should not obtain a hearing in the church, and thus I was condemned without a trial, my accusers being my judges ; nay, it was determined I should not have the benefit of a trial. But, then,

my opponents asserted, *that I only wanted to disturb the peace of the church*, and their assertion was received for undoubted truth, though it was the voice of my opponents, and it covered all defects. As for me, I had neither advocate nor appeal, and thus it stands at this day, and must stand until you remove this bar out of the way to the church, and establish the exercise of open and fair trial in all cases, agreeable to your principles. Then I shall be happy to have my conduct and principles investigated at your bar, without fear of bad consequences either to the church or to myself.

After what has been said, one could scarcely imagine that any plea could be set up for the above practice; yet, from custom and use, it is amazing to observe what prejudices arise. Hence it may be alledged, that “since the cases of separated persons have already been discussed and determined by the church, there is no occasion to revise them again, unless some evident change appears in the person applying for admission; in which case, it is proper for the elders to keep them back, till the state of their minds take a favourable turn.” This argument is very plausible indeed, yet it stands upon false premises; such as,

1st, It supposes that a church cannot err in its first decision, and being infallible, it must be unalterable. This, however, you will not admit, for it is a first principle that a church may err in judging of cases. It therefore follows, that when a separated person thinks himself injured, he is entitled to a new trial; for without a second trial how can it be determined whether the church have erred in the first?

2^{dly}, It supposes that the elders cannot err in

judging that the first decision of the church in the person's case was perfect, and that there are no alterations now in the state of his mind. But neither can this be admitted, because elders may err as well, and more so than a church, being *the few*; besides, there is a danger, especially in these cases, of their becoming partial. Therefore, the question must not stop here, it must go to the church, here alone it can be determined.

3d, It supposes that the elders, though by themselves no judges in cases of discipline, yet they may determine whether cases ought to be admitted to trial. But then, it is determined already, that all cases of difference must be tried, and that to refuse a fair trial, in any case, is an act of the highest injustice and oppression; so that to try if a case ought to be tried, is too gross even to suppose, far more so to avow it to be the duty of Christian elders thus to proceed. The premisses being thus given up, the argument itself must fall to the ground.

Having thus tried the power of elders, as it respects their own particular churches, let us now attend to that part of it which they hold in respect to neighbouring churches. Your principles upon this head are, (for I wish to go no further than they direct me,) *that every church of Christ is perfectly free and independent, in respect to every other church or power, and has the whole power of order and discipline within itself.* But while these are your professed principles, the following practices in opposition thereto exist among you; as 1st, When application is made to your elders by a neighbouring church for their assistance, in setting their office-bearers apart, you hold the principle, that in case of such application, the elders may re-

fuse to assist, till they are satisfied with the propriety of the step intended by said church. Influenced by this principle, have not the church at Edinburgh more than once brought the affairs of other churches to a discussion before them, as if they had been their own concerns, and as if they had authority to say how they should be settled. Now, the question is, how does the adoption of this principle, and the consequent canvassing of the affairs of other churches before you, consist with the former foundation principle you profess to the world, "that every church in its order and discipline is perfect in respect to other churches, having the whole power within itself?" You must at once perceive, that the one of these principles is the reverse of the other, and therefore one of them must be given up.

It is astonishing, indeed, how the mind, by habit or intimacy, adopts ideas at one time, which, at another, it highly disapproved of. It is upon this principle alone, that I can account for your elders taking it upon them to controul the decision of Christian churches, by withholding their assistance when called to their being set in order; I say, controul and subject them to their single authority; for such church must, in that case, submit its freedom to a neutral power, or be separated from the communion by persisting in its own free choice. But upon the principles of Christian discipline, I ask both elders and members among you, Who made it the duty of elders, when called on such occasions, to call in question the propriety of measures adopted by a Christian church? Is one man, for instance, a fitter judge in those matters than a whole church? And, being a neutral, can he be

better informed as to their characters and concerns than the church themselves? Nay, suppose he were a member, and an elder among them, he could only have one voice in the case; and how then, being a neutral, can he have more voices than the whole church, and thus lord it over them? The thing is truly absurd.

The scripture rule in this case is, *chuse ye out from among yourselves men of honest report*---Hence the choice in this case belongs solely to the church itself, and no power on earth has a right to interfere nor object to its choice. Of course it is no part of the assisting elder's duty to judge of the propriety of the step; neither, therefore, is he accountable for the consequences. His duty is only to assist, and to give his simple advice, if required.

Perhaps the ground upon which the elders claim this power (for I never heard it) is, the exhortation to Timothy, *to lay hands suddenly on no man*; but little did I expect once to see so much of Episcopacy asserted among you, as to suppose that this exhortation respected *men* who had the choice and approbation of Christian churches; neither could such laying on of hands be counted *suddenly*, as such choices necessarily require time and deliberation. I rather suppose, then, that that exhortation respected the appointment of Evangelists, in which case the choice of the subject was vested in Timothy himself; and that, because those Evangelists were not church officers, nor generally nominated by the churches, but by the apostles, or such as Timothy, who laid hands upon them.

To understand this exhortation as referring to the appointment of elders, &c. in churches,

would lead to dreadful consequences indeed ; as it would establish the authority of one man over the most important rights and privileges of many churches, and thus overthrow that sacred Christian liberty with which Christ has made us free ; and it would enable such a man, by the dependence of the churches upon him, to promote such persons in them as he thought fit, or as most favoured his own particular schemes ; whereas the discipline and order of Christian churches appear framed, as if on purpose to prevent the existence of such a power, by constituting every church the judge of its own affairs. Yet, allow this principle to remain in force, that an elder has it in his power to refuse the call of a neighbouring church to assist at their ordination, on pretence that he is not satisfied, while said church continues in the faith, and this power is at once established among the elders ; and though it may have come to that now, that though some elders may refuse, yet others may obey if they chuse, it does not in the main alter the case ; because still the power of all the elders to refuse is admitted, and may happen to take place, by which many churches may be over-awed and controuled. Besides, it is claiming a power and influence over the churches to which they have no title.

In the 2^d place, here, I cannot but consider as of the same nature with the above power, that meddling interference of the elders of one church in some particular cases of discipline, which takes place in others. The matter stands thus ;—when any case of a serious and seemingly unmanageable nature occurs in another church, in place of going on with it in the strength of Christ, the elder or elders immediately calls in the assist-

ance of neighbouring elders to the discussion. The elders at Edinburgh are least in the practice of inviting assistance in such cases, and most in the practice of going to assist others; but how they manage matters in general, on such occasions, is best known to themselves; but from the specimen which I have seen, and experienced of this kind of discipline, I do not admire it. At present, however, we have to inquire what your principles are in respect to such cases.

And these principles are, *that every church of Christ is competent to manage its own affairs*, and therefore, in no absolute need of any foreign assistance in any case; but in place of foreign assistance, they are to depend upon the power of their Head and King to assist them, in which dependence they need not fear the issue of the keenest contest. Farther, as a church of Christ is under the power and controul of no person or body of men on earth, it is plain, that none can assist them, but by their own consent. Their elders, in such cases, have no authority to call in foreign assistance, but by the consent, not only of the church, but especially of the parties concerned in the case. For elders to proceed without such consent, would be to betray a design, and to steal a march upon the church or the parties; yet I believe it would but seldom happen, that such consent, in a divided church, could be obtained, and is, perhaps, as seldom sought. Without it, however, such assistance must be considered as an intrusion and a violation of the rights of the church to manage its own affairs, and of the parties rights, to be tried only by their own church, with its own elders and deacons, and by

no other ; especially, such as they know, are brought on purpose to manage them.

It does not appear from their history that the primitive churches dealt much in this kind of assistance ; for except in the case of the elders of the church at Antioch going to that of Jerusalem, we have no instance where the elders of another church were present at discipline, and in that case, they did not go to assist, but to give *evidence*, and to ascertain the truth of the report of the Judaizing teachers who came from hence. And as to the powers which the apostles had over the churches in some cases, our elders do not succeed them in office. Neither (so far as I know) do we read of the apostles once leaving their own places and present employment, to assist churches in the most trying cases of discipline. Whatever, therefore, may be proper in elders of different churches, in consulting and advising in other respects, it does not appear from any thing I can learn, that they are warranted to interfere in the discipline of other churches.

For, besides their not having a right by their office, to go beyond their own church, except to preach the gospel, it does not appear evident from scripture rule, that another church ought to call them to officiate as their own elders, which they are not ; because, on this very account, they must, in many respects, be unqualified for leading the discipline of another church. For instance, an acquaintance with the church is absolutely necessary to exercise discipline with effect. Without this intimacy, which none can have with a church but its own elders, a neutral person must often feel himself at a very great loss. But, what is of the highest importance, a neutral

elder cannot have such a thorough knowledge of the case under consideration, not being on the spot at the time it broke out, he cannot view it in all its circumstances and connections ; besides, he is liable to be betrayed by the exaggerated report of opposite parties, to judge falsely of persons and facts. Again, not being the church's own elders, such are more ready to be found fault with, and suspected of design for taking a very active part, which they must do against one or both parties. These are not mere *probabilities*, they are *facts*, and such important facts too, as go to disqualify neutral elders for taking any management in the discipline of another church, even allowing they had been present at the discussion by accident, or mutual consent. The same reasons are equally forcible against their interfering in such cases by advice or writing ; because it is ten to one but they will proceed on a mistake from want of sufficient and genuine information, which is very difficult to be obtained in such cases.

From these and such considerations, I am clearly of opinion, that such interference can be attended with no good effect. I know of cases where certain things have been carried, but am far from thinking that these were good in effect, or that in general matters would not have happened better without such interference. Differences in churches are of the nature of family ones, where the parties do not wish to be exposed, and therefore, take offence at the officious interference of their neighbours. The interference of neighbouring elders in church feuds, is of the same nature, and, for the most part, attended with similar effects. Besides, for what purpose is foreign

assistance called, but to strengthen one of the parties ; and must not such a step tend to enrage, in place of softening the temper of the other, and in such circumstances what effects are to be expected?

Thus, taking every possible view of the subject, the interference of foreign assistance, in church discipline, is very exceptionable---is subject to all the suspicions of design, and is of an officious nature, so much so indeed, that persons of a generous turn of mind would not chuse to be so employed. They would feel the delicacy of it to such a degree, that though, by accident, they happened to be present in a neighbouring church on such an occasion, they would carefully avoid taking any active hand in their affairs, unless solicited thereto by all the parties ; much less, surely, would they undertake a journey for such purpose, cheerfully, even with such consent, or solicitation, nor for any consideration without it.

The above practice of elders assisting, and the former pretence of elders refusing to assist in the organization of churches, are both attended with one very important consequence, and none can say to what pitch it may arrive through time ; that is, it gives to elders so much employed upon assisting occasions, and so much depended upon in such cases, and having such power over the organization of churches and their dependencies, a degree of consequence and sway over such churches, as consider themselves thus dependent, that it is quite inconsistent with the humble situation of Christian elders, and with the freedom and independence of Christian churches. I have already proved, that this must be the consequence of claiming that power in respect to the organization of churches, and it is easy to see,

that it must also be the consequence of frequent assistance in the discipline of other churches. It arises from this consideration, That once admit the necessity of calling in foreign assistance in the management of discipline, this very idea damps the mind of the churches, and persuades them, that they themselves are not competent to manage their own affairs ; that in that respect they must depend upon foreign aid, counsel, and advice ; and as soon as this idea is conceived, the churches are subjected to the influence of their foreign aid, in place of having their whole dependence, in that respect, upon the grace and power of Christ. Hence as soon as any thing of a serious nature occurs, in place of employing their patience and Christian virtues, the church, or its elders, in a cowardly manner neglect its duty, and (for shame) apply to *foreign human aid*, the most unlikely thing in the world to rectify the matter. For, though it should succeed to a certain degree, it is demonstrable, that the church without it would have succeeded farther, and more to the satisfaction of all concerned, and that too, without yielding their liberty as a church.

As a farther proof of the points stated, I shall appeal, my friends, to your own experiences : Have you not felt the subjugation of mind above described when so circumstanced ? Doubtless you have ; and how inconsistent it is with the gospel, I need not insist. But is there not a fact to which I can refer you ? Yes. Look, for instance, at the consequence of the elders in Edinburgh, with respect to the elders and churches around them, and inquire from what source it arises, and say, if the consequence I have stated does not appear. Far be it from me to

to say any thing disrespectful or hurtful to the Christian characters, or usefulness of such deserving men, whose praise, upon the whole, will continue in the churches; but I would not for their sakes conceal the truth, nor have pleasure in seeing them raised by the diminution of the churches of Christ; for this would only be to make them less useful. In order, therefore, for them to be truly great in the scripture sense of Christian elders, they must give up the whole power of discipline and order to the churches; and, in respect to the exercise of discipline, circumscribe their labours to their own church. But in order fully to illustrate the evils attending the forementioned interference of the elders, in the affairs of other churches, I will state two cases which happened in the church while I was a member, and which I will not soon forget. The first instance of their interference took place on occasion of an attempt being made by a party in the church to remove me from the elder's office, which without any resistance, though not proved disqualified, I yielded it to them, lest my retaining it should prove a cause of strife. Having proceeded thus far, my colleague, who had taken the lead against me, not seeming to suspect that matters would have come to the point on such a sudden, stopped proceeding any farther until he consulted the elders at Edinburgh, as to the propriety of advising the church to request me to resume my office. I knew not, then, what was the cause of the stop, nor until I judged it to have been the case, from the future proceedings of my opponent; upon which I enquired, and found, to my astonishment, that my oppo-

ment had gone to Edinburgh in the interim, called the elders together, and upon his bare report, they determined how matters should be settled in my case, and upon his return they were settled accordingly. Now, it is not my business here to enquire, whether the determination of the elders was right or wrong. What is of much more importance, is the fact as thus appearing, that the influence of those elders arising from the foregoing powers, was so great in our church, that this much could not be settled without their assistance and concurrence ; and on this account I have since considered that my affairs were more in the power of those elders, than in the power of the church in which I then presided.

Another remarkable circumstance in the above determination is, that it was concluded upon the bare report of my opponent, from whom at best they could only have expected a partial account of a case in which he himself was a party. Just judgment necessarily requires the hearing of both parties, because without such a hearing there can be no certainty in any case, and, consequently, no just decision. I have only stated those particulars, to show what sort of discipline churches may expect, when conducted or influenced by a power without themselves ; and to the same purpose consider the following facts :

When the dispute between my opponent and me had come so far, as that it could not be settled but by an appeal to the church, I was told, " that it was necessary to call some brethren from Edinburgh, (meaning some elders) to assist." I answered, " that I saw not the smallest occasion for such a measure, and that I had hitherto believed the church was competent to manage its

own affairs." I was again told by Mr A—— "that some must be called, for how otherwise could a fair report be taken over;" and thus it went against me. Here, again, we have to remark the dependence of this church upon the elders at Edinburgh, hence the concern for *a fair report going there*. But having some of their elders present, my opponents would be satisfied, that no blame would attach to them on my account from that quarter.

Accordingly, one of the elders came. But though it is a standing practice, as you know, on such occasions, to call the parties together, and hear their accounts before the meeting of the church; yet even this practice was now omitted in respect to me, who knew not that such an one was arrived, except by accident. All this while, however, he was employed in consulting and advising with my opponents. But all this time I was perfectly ignorant of what was going on.

I shall leave it to those who witnessed it, to report what followed, as I have only stated what answers my present purpose, which is not to reflect upon any, but to give an instance of the danger of calling for assistance in cases of discipline, which I leave to your consideration and improvement. Allow me only to remark, that this gross partiality against me in the origin of the business, was a bad sign of what was to follow in the farther prosecution of it; and whether it was a good sign or not, such of you as were present can say.

But though I have set those instances before you, to show the evils which may occur under the present system, yet I would be far from leading you to think, that such evils fall out in

every case where assisting elders are called. I intend no such thing. But, what I say is, that such calls, not being necessary for, nor in their own nature suitable to, the established order, and management of Christian discipline, they are liable to suspicion, as if only intended to strengthen the elders' party, and therefore liable to such abuses, and ought not to be allowed; for the elders' party, when it comes to that issue, may be as much in the wrong as their opponents; and in such a case, the church itself is the only authoritative and impartial judge, and the only competent one, who stands in no need of human assistance.

Dear Friends---Having thus far led you into a clear view, I hope, of your principles and my own, on the subject of church order, I will next subjoin some remarks on your manner of conducting discipline, which, I trust, will be of service. But, before I proceed to this, I beg leave to observe, that no remarks of mine in the preceding pages, are to be understood as attaching blame either to the elders among you, or the churches on account of the existence of the practices objected to; because neither the elders nor churches (so far as I know) have attempted to establish them as standing rules in the churches; neither have they attempted to defend them, by any scripture authority that I have heard of; nor have they as yet refused to give them up, after their inconsistency has been exposed. It appears to me that these practices have crept in inadvertently, without being duly attended to by either elders or churches. They cannot, therefore, be to blame for not altering things they neither saw to be wrong, nor had been pointed out to them

as such. This, however, cannot be said in future. Those practices are now, at least, so far laid open in their natures and tendencies, as that you may understand them, though with much weakness, and far less to advantage than if it had been done by some others. This being the case, you must be to blame only by persisting in, defending, or appointing them as standing rules among you, which, I pray, may not be the case; nay, it will not be the case though attempts were made to effect it; for in general they are of such a nature, that being exposed, in opposition as they stand, to the principles you hold, they must of course be abandoned.

For instance, the first case of discipline which may occur, it is in the power of the offender to demand that his case should be laid before the church at once, without troubling the elders, saying, *tell it to the church*. Is there any among you who would be hardy enough to refuse, or say, that he requested a wrong thing? I believe not; and what then will become of all the things I have objected to, when thus their foundation is removed? Whatever, therefore, shall be the different opinions of the churches in respect to these points, there appears no occasion for warm disputes or separations, or a leaving of the church on either side, while no attempts are made to bind the yoke upon the necks of the disciples by the sanction of authority, which, I think, there is no reason to fear; and while that is not the case, they will soon disappear, and still the churches remain in perfect peace, as I pray they may forever do, though I should continue to hang my harp upon the willow trees, and sit by Babel's streams and weep; I will always wish the prof-

perity of Sion, and peace to be within her walls. Therefore, whoever he be among you who should carry matters to that length, to disturb the peace of the church, he is not my friend; neither does he promote the design of my Address, which is intended to reform, and not to disturb the peace of the churches.

In considering the manner of conducting your discipline, it is not your principle nor rules of proceeding to which I object. In this respect we are agreed. I only object to the *manner* in which you exercise the rules you hold on that important subject. Neither need you at all be surprised, though faults should be found to exist among you; for churches, as well as individuals, are liable to departures and backslidings, both in respect to the principle and spirit of their profession. It need, therefore, be matter of no surprise to find such things among you. The fact is, that it is a surprise the faults are so few, and that those which do exist, have not done more mischief. This, however, is no reason why they should remain, nor why you should take it amiss to be put in mind of them.

As to the manner of conducting discipline, then, it appears to me to be faulty in respect to the time and spirit of it, and so far in respect to its object. As to time, it is in general too rapid, and carried through the different stages with too much dispatch and hurry, as opposed to that calm, deliberate, and cautious manner, which is necessary and becoming in so serious and interesting a concern. The human mind, when once agitated, requires not only persuasions, but time to become calm, and to resume its proper temper by reflection, and some tempers require more deliberation

than others ; therefore, to precipitate a brother in this state, from one discussion to another, is to increase his distemper, in place of restoring him. Therefore, in place of hurrying to a conclusion, we ought rather to defer, and visit him from time to time, in good humour, until frequent deliberate attempts in private, convince him that nothing but exposing him to *one or two more* will do. Neither is he to be hurried through this stage, but must be allowed time to consider and reflect coolly upon what they may lay before him. And should unavoidable necessity bring him to the church, he must have the same indulgence there also ; because, in the nature of things, reasoning in such cases, without time and reflection, goes for nothing. I should therefore think it a proper thing, and what would have a good effect on many, and what at least would render all more inexcusable, to allow the offender some time to reflect after the judgment of the church was given in his case, before his final separation. I am clearly of opinion, that this indulgence would prevent many a separation, and speak much to the honour of the churches. I shall only observe farther as to time, that no degree of unreasonable obstinacy or passion in an offender, can excuse the shortening of the time which is necessary for reflection ; on the contrary, such cases naturally require more time ; for time and patience will seldom fail to overcome. And why are *patience, forbearance, and long-suffering*, enjoined in the gospel, if they are not to be exercised in these cases where much opposition is to be encountered ? I should like to know from any of you, in what other cases these virtues could be exercised by brethren, one to another, to more ad-

vantage than in cases of discipline, where differences and oppositions take place? But if so, how can patience, long-suffering, and forbearance, be said to *have their perfect work* in a case that is precipitated from one step to another, while the person is under a fit of passion! So far from it, that the best that can be said of such discipline is, that a brother has been taken the advantage of, while blind to his own fate. Remember, that “charity *suffereth long, and is kind.*” It is our own humour that yields the contest before the time.

In respect to the spirit in which discipline should be conducted, I know that you all will admit you may be deficient in it, but that is not all I mean; but what I principally intend is, that on some occasions, if I am not deceived in my opinion of that mild and moderate manner in which discipline ought to be conducted towards offenders, it is managed with a degree of seeming severity, which rather tends to irritate, harden, and provoke the offender, than to soften and restore him, which is the thing intended by Christian discipline. I have felt this severity myself frequently and keenly. I have seen a sister almost at the fainting under it, and obliged to call for a little water, and a brother shed tears. Now I say, that this kind of discipline is more the inflicting of a punishment than the exercising of Christian discipline.

Besides, this kind of severe discipline may be perverted into a very bad use; for by such usage it were an easy matter to provoke a person, of whose company his opponents were weary, to leave the church, when, perhaps, they could not put him away as a wicked person upon any other ground. This is literally the effect it had

upon me. I left the church because I could stand it no longer ; and, at a time too, when, though I called them to do it, my opponents could lay no offence to my charge, as the whole church can witness, and I could not have been put away but by this single instrument. Consequently, to this device I owe my present situation.

But this kind of treatment should not have been condemned on my account, were it not contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and to the nature of Christian discipline, which should be directed by *love*. Brotherly love is the spirit of Christian discipline, and to manage discipline is, to exercise brotherly love one to another. But love and severity are here at variance ; so that none can say, when he is treating a brother harshly, that he is exercising *love to his soul* ; because love will not teach a Christian to punish a brother, or use him unfeelingly ; no, even the rebuke of love is administered kindly, and with a feeling heart.

The temper which a church is bound to express towards its brethren, in the exercise of discipline, is meekness, as, “ Ye that are spiritual restore such an one *in the spirit of meekness*, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” And as meekness is a temper of mind, which especially suits the nature and ends of discipline, so in no case is a church warranted to deviate from it, nor to make discipline an instrument of slavery and terror, in place of friendship and reformation. To rebuke sharply “ does not appear to refer to cases of serious discipline ; but to the duties of brotherly admonition and reproof, where no farther proceedings are intended ; and when it is said, “ *some save with fear*,” it cannot mean, with a fearful and terrifying discipline ; but, *fear of*

the fleshly spotted garments of sin, and the consequent danger to the brother's soul ; so that no severity is intended.

The severity complained of consists, *1st*, In assuming a magisterial authority, mien, and air, towards a brother, in place of brethren *considering themselves, lest they also be tempted* to commit the same evil they have now found in their brother. This consideration would teach them *that* humility which they now propose to him. *2dly*, In using severe, indiscreet, sarcastical, or wounding language, in place of that of sympathy, meekness, and moderation. *3dly*, In magnifying lesser offences into greater ones, or representing a brother's offence to be worse than it really is. *4thly*, In shewing an inclination to criminate a brother when the evidence is not clear, or in standing in doubt of his innocence, or of the sincerity of his declarations when there is no evident proof to the contrary, in opposition to *charity which thinketh no evil*. *5thly*, In not forgiving frankly and freely, upon a brother's confession and repentance ; but expressing doubts and fears notwithstanding, where charity ought to think no evil.

Much evil is committed in such cases, I believe, with an intention to avoid it. It is expected, in general, that brethren should express much conviction and contrition, at least, such as to meet the ideas the church have adopted of the evil of their offences ; which, doubtless, it is their duty to express as far as conviction prompts. But in most cases it is very doubtful, if the brethren, or the church, were in the confessor's case when such scruples are expressed, if they themselves would confess more than they do in similar circumstances, if this rule is admitted, *that we can*

see the mote in a brother's eye, though not the beam in our own. We must also admit, that our own confessions of sin before God come very far short of their magnitude in his sight ; yet, on this account, our confessions are not insincere, nor our sins unforgiven. Churches must also consider, that in forgiving a brother, a church is not doing an act of justice, in which rule and form are to be observed ; but they are showing mercy, which stands not upon the tip-toe of scrupulous nicety, but flows where it finds vent. Therefore the least appearance of repentance is a sufficient ground for the church's mercy in any case, where mercy can be extended ; and to hesitate after this ground is expressed, however imperfectly, or to insist for more, is to tarnish the lustre of mercy, and to strip it of all its sweetness. It is, therefore, with the greatest propriety, that our Lord has commanded his churches *to forgive*, if a *brother but turn to them and say*, I REPENT, according to which command, a church can insist upon no more words in a confession, if they should not come freely, and of the penitent's own fulness of heart.

But the severity of discipline does not always cease at the determination of cases. It sometimes follows those who are separated out of the churches in various directions. It is ten to one but such accounts of the causes of their separation are set abroad after them, as must affect their characters in society. What idea can people have of one, for instance, who is represented by the church, “ as an enemy to the profession of Christ's name ; a disturber of the church's peace ; a denier of the binding obligation of the Sabbath day, and a transactor of worldly business on that

day," and the like. Suppose such things were true ; is it becoming in a church of Christ to retail them, to the prejudice of their neighbour ? Much less so, surely, since they are not true, not in the least syllable.

Another kind of severity which those in this situation suffer is, the distant and surly behaviour of members towards them. It is true, that separated persons will not expect from the members that kind of familiar *company* which they once enjoyed, nor that the members will eat with them. None of them, I suppose, will take offence at the members for observing those things which they profess to be duty. But, under these pretences, they must not suppose it their duty to avoid speaking to separated persons when they have occasion to see any of them, or that they ought not on such occasions to take the smallest notice of them as acquaintances ; no, the law of Christ requires no such rudeness to be offered to a fellow-creature. It is, on the contrary, the duty of members, on such occasions, according to the spirit of their profession, at such opportunities, to show a concern for the welfare of separated persons, and convince them, by so doing, that they entertain no prejudice against them. How much more like the spirit of Christianity would such discreet behaviour be, than to offer what every man considers as a high affront, and a sure sign of ill nature, to pass an acquaintance without speaking, or taking the least notice of him ?

But the worst severity separated persons have to endure is, in their returning to the churches again, when they come to think seriously of their situation. In this state, when they look forward to the church, like the prodigal to his Fa-

ther's house, it stands a great way off, and many difficulties lie in the way. The elders must be satisfied in the first place, and after them the church ; and who can prevail upon himself, without a very uneasy feeling, to answer all the questions respecting delicate matters, and to satisfy all the scruples which are sure to be proposed in such a tedious proceeding ? I doubt not but all this would be an easy matter to those who never had it to do, and, perhaps, for that reason only ; those who have had experience know best what it is, and that one reason, why so few have returned is its difficulty, and the faint hope of succeeding after all their endeavours.

The return of the prodigal was surely intended as a pattern to the churches, yet we see how different it is from the present cold and scrupulous receptions we have witnessed. The attitude of the Father is gracious and inviting ; *he sees the prodigal while yet a great way off*, and runs to meet him. How encouraging to the son the knowledge of this fact ? No question is put about the depth of his convictions ; no repetition is made of past offences, though aggravated ; his sincerity is never doubted ; neither is he allowed to confess so much as at first he proposed to himself, nor in the whole of it does he mention one circumstance of his aggravated offence. Yet what joy and transport are expressed by all, except the elder brother ; except he who never knew what it was to repent, but *always obeyed his Father's commandment* in his own opinion. This upright man was seriously offended at such a waste of mercy, *he would not go in* ; neither would he believe his brother had repented ; for still he calls him, *THIS thy son who hath devoured thy liv-*

ing ; nay, he aggravates his offence, as is common, by putting *devour* in place of *waste*, and *barlots* in place of *riotous living*. But, after this, what sort of a confession of repentance from the prodigal would have satisfied this pious man ? Or would the case have been made any better, but so much the worse of such an extorted confession as it must have been ? Or may I not rather ask, Would not the prodigal have judged it a vain thing ever to attempt to satisfy such a severe and scrupulous man ? Brethren, these things are written for our admonition and example ; let us beware of acting the rigid Pharisee while we profess to reprobate his self-righteous spirit.

In respect to the design of discipline, you profess it to be *the restoration and recovery of the offender*, and that in every case, those where exclusion is necessary not excepted ; the end is, *that their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord*. Were this end steadily kept in view in the discussions of discipline, there would be no danger of undue hurry, partiality, nor severity, all of which every Christian knows to be totally inconsistent with attaining this important end, and must, unavoidably, produce an opposite effect. On this account, therefore, it becometh all of you who fear God, and know that one day you must give an account to him of the manner in which you now treat your brethren in the discussions of discipline, to have no other end in view ; no private, personal, nor church consideration, nor to act in such a manner as to give the offender the least ground to suspect such a thing, lest you thereby prevent his recovery, and bring his blood upon yourselves.

Doubtless you will all agree, that no private nor personal consideration should influence your minds in the exercise of discipline; I am not sure, however, if you will say this much for the considerations which respect the church. You know what a powerful motive a regard to *the peace and safety* of the church is, when these are endangered by a case of discipline. And, certainly, the peace of the church is of vast importance, nor would any possessed of the fear of God wantonly disturb it, nor risk the safety of the church for his own personal considerations. But then the peace of the church, however important, is only valuable, or desirable, when it can be preserved in consistency with the free and full exercise of duty; more especially when the end and design of discipline is obtained, the salvation of the offender's soul, because this end is infinitely more important than the peace of the church.

For, for what purpose is it that churches are established in the world? Is it not chiefly to promote the salvation of souls? Yes. Surely, then, the end is far greater than the mean or instrument employed to attain it; and, consequently, the salvation of a sinner is a far greater affair than the existence of a church; nay, than the being of many churches. The same thing is affirmed of duty, in administering justice between brethren in the simplest case, or, indeed, any duty we are commanded, it is of infinitely greater importance than the being of churches; because duty, in any degree or case, cannot be dispensed with without sin; whereas the being of a church may; and, because the importance of churches lies in promoting duty as the only important consideration. From thence it fol-

lows, that when a church fails to admit the free and full exercise of duty, and when it puts any of its own concerns in the balance against the recovery of a sinner from the error of his ways, it has come so far short of the end of its being, that it evidently frustrates that end, and ought no longer to exist in that state ; in such a church the less peace the better, until it is dissolved or reformed, and its peace made to consist with, and promote duty, the end of its being.

Certainly all of you admit that there is a difference between a church and the end for which it is intended ; and with what grace, then, can you cry, *the peace of the church*, in cases of personal trial, as a reason why the same forms and moderation should not be observed ? Or are we thus to understand the words, *the danger of the church* on some occasions ? If we are, then I must lay it down as a principle, that it were far better that the peace of the church were in danger, and even hurt, than that one iota of the established rules of discipline were dispensed with, for the purpose of preserving the peace of the church. The reasons are, *1st*, because though the peace of the church were even broken, it might, through good management, be restored again without injury ; but to omit or overlook one of the established rules of Christian discipline, is not only a real injury intendedly done to the brother before them, which is highly sinful, but also a high breach of commanded duty, which is of more consequence than the peace of many churches, and brings sin upon the church where it exists. *2^{dly}*, Though a case may have a bad appearance, yet it is cutting before the point to say,

that it will hurt the peace of the church. What ! can we not trust the church to the power of Christ in such cases ? Or when is it that we are to commit her to his care ? Or are we to go about to make that sure ourselves which is already made sure in Christ ? 3dly, Once admit the danger of the church as a rule for deviation in one case, the same reason is equally strong in another, till at last the peace of the church shall become her sure destruction. Accordingly, the peace of the church, in opposition to plain duty, and a brother's rights, is a partial, sinful, and a cowardly argument in the mouth of a professed Christian, and ought not to be spoken of in the churches, when it tends to interfere with duty.

Yet, if I mistake not, I have heard, that the peace of the church has been given as a reason why some could not be admitted to a hearing of their cause in the church, and why discipline should not be allowed to linger in the church, lest offenders should have time to communicate and form parties, but that no time should be lost in bringing them to a conclusion. If this is the case, as I doubt there may be ground to conclude, no wonder, indeed, though such discipline should not succeed to satisfaction, and though so many who have suffered complain ; for, should the consideration be avoided in any case, it must have its effect in leading the church for their own safety, to neglect, omit, or contradict their duty to the offender, and thus give him reason to complain, and that justly too, of undue hurry, want of a Christian spirit, and partiality, if not of actual injustice.

But let us examine the merits of this method of preserving the peace of the churches. Is it

really such as ought to be recommended for that purpose, supposing there were no evil in sacrificing the offender for the sake of the church? In reason it appears to be the very reverse; for, to give the offender, in any case, just cause to complain of injustice or partiality, or even to give him ground to suspect such things, or to believe, that the peace of the church was secured at his expence, would be the most effectual method of assisting him to form a party against the church, were he so inclined; doubtless it would, by interesting the feelings of numbers in his behalf, on account of the treatment he complained of, who would then lose sight of his criminality by their sympathy for his sufferings; neither could his exclusion prevent the effects of such feelings, if the case was understood. Those feelings, again, could not fail to be accompanied with a kind of abhorrence at this manner of treatment, and the more so, as one day they might expect to be treated in the same manner themselves, should such principles be avowed. In such circumstances, it is impossible but the offender must have advocates within the church. Neither ought we, in weighing this consideration, to forget the report of the church's proceedings, which the offender would carry to the world, nor its effect upon the credit of the church; neither ought we to forget the means he still has in his power of communicating with the members. All this time we suppose the church at peace, while the above causes are working gradually to an explosion, and where then will be the peace of the church? Have such things never broke out, or is it any wonder they should? But, were cases properly managed at first, and every point of form attended to in

the spirit of Christ, and every indulgence granted without fear, the event must have been, either the recovery, or the discovery of the offender; and, in either case, the church were safe and secure, and the offender's mouth stopped. Hence it follows, that the peace and safety of the church lie in the free, impartial, and full exercise of its duty, leaving the consequences to the management of Christ. Then, *the gates of hell shall not prevail against her*. In the prosecution of discipline, then, let our aim be single, and let that aim be, *only the recovery of the offender*, without fear of danger or loss of reward; for in duty lies the safety of the church.

CONCLUSION.

DEAR FRIENDS,

HAVING succeeded thus far in the vindication of the profession, and the principles we hold, from the reflections which naturally arise from the practices objected to; I must now say something in my own defence, against the *vague* and *injurious* reports respecting my character, principles, and conduct, which have proceeded from the churches. I call these reports *vague*, notwithstanding the most important of them have been given as an *authentic* communication to the church at Edinburgh, because, though thus formally stated to them, these reports were never submitted to a fair examination before me in the church, nor

was I ever consulted about, nor heard in respect to them, neither publicly nor privately; but they were merely taken up as found among my opponents in my absence, and carried to Edinburgh, and there publicly stated as facts, and as such received by you. And, as such, they cannot be considered as facts regularly attested, (as they ought to have been, according to your profession, and the regular order of Christian discipline, which directs, *that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established* in the presence of the parties in the church;) but, as the mere *vague* and *partial* report of one of the parties against the other, and, as such, entitled to no degree of credit.

It may be answered, that my present declaration, being that of one of these parties, is entitled to at least as little credit as the reports of my opponents. This is admitted to the full, where nothing but my simple declaration exists; but I have stated nothing without proof; for in all my preceding statements respecting my own case, I have also stated the facts upon which they stand, and of which my opponents themselves are witnesses; and how then can the truth of them be questioned?

For instance, will my opponents even now say, that I was called along with them to answer for myself, at the consultation which was held in my opponent's house the evening before the meeting of the church, to consider my case? No. They cannot. Again, will they say, that my case was submitted to the examination of the church in my presence, or that the reports which were then formally communicated to the church at Edinburgh, were examined before me in the church

in Kirkcaldy, and proved *in the mouth of two or three witnesses*? Or was not this the fact, That when witnesses were asked to prove one assertion, my opponent said, *he had no witness but himself*, and hence it fell to the ground? These facts cannot be denied. Neither can it be denied, that before I left the church, I requested my opponents to prove any one ground of offence against me, if they had it in their power, and they did not attempt it. Now, if these cannot be denied, because there are witnesses in Kirkcaldy to prove the contrary, upon what ground of truth or propriety could I be represented in a formal communication to the church in Edinburgh, as “a denier of the binding obligations of the Sabbath-day; as a transactor of worldly business on that day, and a vindicator of so doing; as one, who, previous to assistance coming from Edinburgh, had left the church in an irreconcilable spirit, and who only meant to return to the discussion of his case to debate his cause?” If these things were true, why were they not proved to be so in my presence? And if they could not admit of proof there, they could not be made true by being formally rehearsed to the church of Edinburgh in my absence. Neither can it be denied, that such a communication was actually made, and firmly believed among you, though it goes to unchristianise my character, as if it were so trivial a matter in the sight of God, as that no shadow of proof was necessary to the propagation of scandal.

But, though now I should assert, as I hereby do, that the whole of the above communication is false, it cannot be alledged, that I have nothing to prove this fact but my own assertion; for every

circumstance which I have stated here as undeniable, is a proof that it is false; for why else could it not have been examined and found true? Add farther, why else is the examination of it so perseveringly refused to this day? But if it is still doubted, I hope the following fact will put it beyond doubt: It is this, that in consequence of my having complained of this communication to one of the Edinburgh elders as false and injurious, it was publicly altered so far, as, that the reporter now declared, "he never intended to insinuate, that H. C. had denied the binding obligation of the Sabbath-day, nor transacted worldly business on that Sabbath, but that he had crossed the water frequently on the Sabbath, intending to do business on the Monday." But had the first account been correct, or correctly understood, where was the necessity for this second one so different? And if it is a fact that he did not intend to insinuate that I had denied the binding obligation of the Sabbath, (as I will not say but it may be the case,) how came the church to understand him in that sense, and not only so, but to hold it as true to this day, notwithstanding the above contradiction of it? Do these things bear the characteristics of truth? Of such unquestionable truth, as is requisite to establish an apostate character? By no means.

It is true that I crossed the water on the Sabbath evening, in order to do business on the Monday, and only once for that purpose; and the only vindication ever I offered for it was on the ground of the necessity of the case, as the church will remember, and I am certain that no church will refuse it as sufficient, in the case alluded to. This, then, being the true state of the

case, as cannot be denied, shall my opponents be justified by you, in representing me to be not a Sabbath-breaker only, but a denier of its binding obligation, and a doer of worldly business on that day, &c. and that too, without the benefit of a fair trial? If so, what will then become of the principles of your profession, in respect to discipline, justice, and truth?

But still, you will perhaps say, that it seems quite incredible that any professed Christian, especially such in repute as my opponents were, could be capable of such things. I admit the thing seems difficult of belief to people in your circumstances, and upon this ground I make great allowances for your feelings. But then you have forgotten, that at the time this affair happened, my character was as fair as that of some of my opponents, and of much longer standing in the church; also, that it never was attempted to be blotted but by them, and that only in this single instance; and farther still, that after such a persevering ingenuity in the attempt, none of them have been able to fix one stain upon my character with effect; I say, that forgetting these circumstances in my favour, you have not seen where the greatest difficulty lies, and that is, that on such a sudden, I should have been totally unchristianised, and still the more difficult, as they could advance no solid proof of the fact, and to this day refuse me a trial upon its own merits.

As to the person who came to assist here, and who communicated the report to the church in Edinburgh, I do not impeach him with communicating falsehoods, knowing them to be such; he only told what he heard. But he heard the particulars only from my opponents, who, as

such, could not be considered as witnesses, and he did not hear me in my own defence, which all of you must admit to be wrong, and a far greater wrong, too, than my opponents have been able to establish against me the sufferer. Nay, I will say farther, that I believe the above brother was deceived into the belief of what he reported, by the circumstance of a professed *friend of mine*, as he then called him, giving him a worse account of me, if possible, than my opponents themselves. It was, that I had then left the church in an irreconcilable spirit, and meant only to come to the discussion of my case, to defend my cause. Hence he would naturally conclude, that this brother, who appeared so interested in my behalf, could not be suspected of partiality; yet a more false account never was given, as that brother may well recollect of my saying to him, on the occasion alluded to, "that, though I was afraid from the state of our affairs, that I could not keep my place in the church; yet while the church did me justice, I would continue with them." These were my words to him on that occasion, so that my having left the church, &c. was only his own way of reporting them, and so far it appears he was not my friend. And it appears so still clearer now, from his own confession, for he has since acknowledged, "that he had been privy to some *meetings of the brethren*, whose names he refuses to tell, but who consulted *in this private manner*, that I should be removed from the office I then held in the church, and urged it upon him to act upon his principles against me," without ever giving me the smallest hint of such a secret plot: And my chief opponent has declared it to his face, in my hearing, that this bro-

ther who was taken for my particular friend through the whole of that affair, and appeared most against that measure in public, *was the first who proposed, in private, that I should lay down my office.*

From these circumstances, it was no wonder though the brother, who was called to assist, was deceived into the belief of what he reported to the church in Edinburgh, and it is no wonder to find that the report was of such a nature, when it sprang from such a secret source as private meetings and consultations, which are here admitted to have existed by both these opponents, and that they had put matters in that train, in which they afterwards turned out.

I cannot but remark here, the impropriety and danger of calling foreign assistance to the discussion of cases of discipline, arising from the impossibility there is of their being sufficiently acquainted with the circumstances of such cases, where the whole of their information consists of party relations, the most ready to deceive; it must be much more the case, where only the relations of one of the parties is listened to, as in my case; my supposed friend was consulted, and relied upon in place of myself, who knew nothing of such a consultation! And the private suggestions of this inclosed number were carried to Edinburgh, and from hence to all the neighbouring churches, who have since believed them to be, the authenticated communication of our church, after a full and free examination of my case, a thing which yet remains to be done.

But, to put it beyond doubt that the reports of my opponents respecting my case (and remember you have no reports but theirs on the subject)

are not entitled to credit, I shall instance in one of them, which is, the report you have heard, "that I had preached a very erroneous sermon, which excited the major part of the church against me, to remove me from the office of teacher." It is so far true, that a sermon, preached by me, on subjection to the *powers that be*, was made the occasion of objection by a few, who, at that time, were called *my opponents*, though, till then, I had never heard of them as such. It is also true, that I yielded the office to them then, when they could not have removed me from it upon the ground of error; and I suppose many of you know that my principal opponent went then, as already stated, to Edinburgh, and laid the erroneous nature of the above sermon before the elders there, as the ground of my opponents proceeding against me. This being the case, then, let us now attend to the glaring errors of that sermon. I shall appeal to my opponents themselves, if the two following positions were not the most objectionable, viz. "That Christians should observe the King's Fast-day as such, while not compelled by civil authority, in respect to the ground of fasting, nor to the mode of their worship on such occasions." This was the first error so called; the following was the second; "That the office of a soldier was lawful in itself, though in many respects inexpedient for a Christian to assume; and therefore to volunteer in it was inexcusable. But if a Christian were compelled to take up arms, I could not perceive how he could be to blame, as it then became a matter of necessity, not of choice."

Now, although individuals among you may differ from me in respect to the above senti-

ments; yet these are known to be agreeable to the professed principles of the churches, particularly that of Edinburgh, and if so, where are the glaring errors of the above sermon? Why, they are, to be sure, in the minds of my opponents, whose opinions on these subjects differed from the professed principles of the churches, though in respect to some of them, I knew it not; and, therefore, reported mine as erroneous, merely because their own opinions differed, as it appears from the opposition of my chief opponent, to the principle of the office of a soldier being lawful, the last time that question was before the church at Edinburgh; upon which occasion he himself was the only dissenter, saying, "that he had considered the scriptures then brought forward, to prove its being lawful, and had found that they would not apply." But supposing the brother, who then so fully proved the doctrine, had been in my place, instead of being an elder of that church, would not his sermon have been called an erroneous one by my opponents? There is no doubt of it; neither is there any doubt, but that he considers those brethren, who, in consequence of seeing it to be lawful, have entered the volunteer corps as in an error, if not a sinful one. But how consistently he avowed such an opinion while he continued a member of a society for procuring substitutes for the militia, and thus hired another for doing that which it would be unlawful for himself to do, is a question for you to determine.

Be that as it will, my conclusion, drawn from the foregoing facts, is clearly established, that the reports respecting my principles, character, and motives, which exist among you, are *vague and injurious*; being the unauthenticated suggestions of

my opponents, which never were submitted to the fair examination of a church of Jesus Christ, according to my inviolable right, and your bounden duty as his people ; and that in crediting and propagating them, being such, you greatly injure me, and contradict your own professed principles.

But after such a discussion as the foregoing, may I not expect a mighty outcry against me, as having done all in my power to expose, injure, and destroy the profession and the churches ; and therefore proved myself to be what my opponents gave me out to be, *an enemy to the profession* ? I may, indeed ; and I do lay my account to be thus calumniated by some ; yet, I beg leave to tell them, that they have no better ground for this accusation than for those already mentioned ; for, in order to prove me to be an enemy to the profession and the churches, they must show wherein I have exposed, or spoken evil of them as such ; that is, they must prove that I have denied the Baptist profession, or some of its important principles, denied the churches to be the churches of Christ, having departed from their first principles, and that which it is dangerous to live in communion with, and to act towards them accordingly. This, and this alone, is to be an enemy to a profession ; and to this decision every man of common sense will agree, whatever any of you should say to the contrary : But in opposition to this, I hold your profession to be my own, and your churches, with all their short-comings, to be the churches of Jesus Christ, in whose communion I wish to live and die. Upon what principle, then, am I their enemy ? Or how is it possible that I could intentionally expose or injure them ? You

may as naturally suppose me to be my own enemy, and the designed calumniator of my own character, as to be an enemy to my own faith, and professing people, whom I justify to the world.

Farther, in place of exposing the profession or churches in the preceding Address, I have justified them, and that in the most effectual manner, by pointing out and exposing what exists among you as inconsistent with your avowed principles; and is not this the most effectual way to show my sincere attachment to both the profession and the churches? Doubtless it is. What! are errors and inconsistencies to be winked at, and allowed to pass and spread, because these happen to exist among you, and not among national professors, against whom you so justly exclaim? Or, are sinners, however wise and useful, to be passed over, and not called to repentance, merely because they should happen to be in your communion, or because the offence is not immediately committed against such as are now among you? God forbid! What principle of your profession is it that warrants such a partial, corrupting, and sinful conclusion? None. Let the profession stand justified, then, and every mouth be stopped, yea, and every thing contrary thereto, whether it exists among you or elsewhere, be rooted out.

I have drawn this conclusion, brethren, with boldness, and so much the more so, because I know that each of you will join with me in it; that even my opponents themselves dare not contradict it, and by not contradicting this principle, must allow, that to expose them and the profession or churches, are very different things; and that they may be justly exposed without any pre-

judice to the profession or the churches ; nay, exposed to the advantage of both, by purging out evils.

I am sorry, indeed, to have found of late, by the outcry of *enmity to the profession* against such as might have uttered reflections against some among you, who, for ought you know, might have given just ground for them, that so much ignorance of professed principles exist among you as to suppose, that the exposing of some individuals can be construed into animosity against the profession as such, or the churches; when, in fact, it would argue enmity to the profession, &c. even to attempt to conceal the faults of such individual members, or even churches, as might have stept aside from their duty. I say, that such an outcry, as must proceed from a desire to conceal the faults of our own people, implies a want of that candour and simplicity, which is the peculiar ornament of practical Christianity, and is a peculiar feature in the character of the first Christians. Among them there were no such thing as a desire to conceal the faults of one another, nor did they entertain prejudices against such as had occasion to remark their failings. On the contrary, upon all occasions we find them as faithfully employed in narrating the faults of one another, as they are in recording the transactions to which they refer. Nor is any of you ignorant of the lustre which this frank and honest disposition reflects upon their character, and upon the profession they defended ; nor of how much you yourselves esteem it, and them too, on this very account ; so that in place of bringing them into contempt, as you seem to suppose, it in fact does, and for ever will, procure to them and their

religion, the veneration of mankind, and will ever stand as an irresistible proof of the truth of their pretensions.

You, on the contrary, tremble to think of being thus exposed, and seem to think that the known existence of an inconsistency or fault would eclipse your character before the world, and put an end to your prosperity. Therefore, you wish to appear perfect, and for that purpose, conceal what the first Christians confessed of their own accord, and exposed. Take care that there be not more pride than religion in this idea of perfection, which would remove occasions of reform, and scandalise such as propose a reform of persons or churches, with the title of enemies. Be assured, that the profession, and you both, would appear in a much more amiable light, by a frank and candid avowal of what is wrong, and a friendly treatment of him who has put you in mind of these things, and who is sincerely

Yours,

For the Truth's sake,

HUGH CAMERON.

Kirkcaldy, }
Dec. 12th, 1805. }

AN
APPENDIX,
CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF
SHUTTING THE MEETING HOUSE DOORS,
DURING THE DISCUSSION OF
PUBLIC DISCIPLINE.

CHURCH discipline is properly called public discipline, in distinction from that which is private, and is managed by two or more of the members, apart from the church. But it is to be observed, that any business, such as discipline, can only be called public when it is exposed to public view, or transacted in the public presence, for it is only from this circumstance of the public presence, that it acquires the appellation of public discipline. This will appear the more fully, from a consideration of what constitutes a private discussion. The smallness of the number present at a discussion does not constitute it a private one, but it is the circumstance of selecting a certain number, among whom the discussion is to take place, and the excluding others, which constitutes a private discussion. Therefore, however great the number of persons may be, who are present at a discussion, yet, if

they are a select number, and all the rest of the public are shut out, the discussion is, in every respect, a private one, because the number is chosen and inclosed by themselves.

By this rule, then, the whole discipline of the churches is private, and has no title to the appellation of public discipline. Your calling it public, however, is a plain evidence that your opinion is, that it ought to be public. I am clearly of that opinion, and do think, that the present concealed manner in which church discipline is conducted, is neither creditable in itself, nor attended with good to the profession. Such concealment is not creditable, unless there were a just and necessary cause for it. But no one can find a cause in the nature or effects of a public ordinance of religion. In it there is nothing of which a church need to be ashamed, or that requires to be concealed, but every thing the reverse. Christian discipline is every way honourable in itself, and invites publicity; why then is it concealed?

Perhaps it may be answered, because it is not an honourable thing for churches or members to be found guilty of crimes. True, it is not honourable to be found guilty; but still it must be less honourable to endeavour thus to conceal guilt, which can neither be concealed nor denied, in place of frankly owning it by a public trial. It cannot be denied that crimes do appear in the churches, and that they are liable to the same sins which appear in the world around them; and what folly is it to conceal what we profess to be subject to, and which must take place at times? As the public do not expect the churches to have arrived at perfection in this state, they

would not at all be surpris'd to witness such things among them, neither would they the less esteem them on that account, but so much the more on account of their vigilant detection of sin, which ought to be put from among them. But farther, when cases of discipline fall under a church discussion, it is then too late to endeavour to conceal them from the world, for experience has now evinc'd, that for a whole church to keep a secret is a thing impossible; therefore, let the discussion be ever so private, the fact itself shall go to the public in a still more disfigured manner than if they had seen it; and if any thing of a curious nature in the church's manner of conducting it should occur, it is sure also to go abroad. Can the churches shew me one exception to this statement? But if not, to what purpose do they conceal what must go abroad?

But another question occurs here, and that is, if such cases as come to a church discussion ought to be concealed from the world? It appears they ought not; for both the honour of the profession and the good of the party require they should be expos'd in a public discussion. The honour of the profession requires it; because, how otherwise shall it appear to the world that the gospel is a doctrine according to godliness; that the churches are vigilant against sin; attentive to the conduct of their members; and that they *cannot bear them that do evil*, if the world never witnesses such cases? In such circumstances, would the world not be justified in saying, "That he that says as they say, may live as he pleases in the churches," and, "that notwithstanding all they profess, they are no better than others?" The good of the party also requires an open and pub-

lic discussion, because such exposures must operate as a powerful check to sin. This consideration being a present one, and attended with mortifying reflections, must have a strong effect upon an offender's mind, and would have a happy effect in leading others to behave in such a manner as to avoid a public exposure, either by a persevering course of sin, or obstinate resistance to conviction, which must be considered as a just punishment annexed to such offences. But a concealing of such offenders must have a contrary effect in divesting them of that awe of coming before the church tribunal which ought to possess their minds, and deter them from sin. Upon every account, then, such offenders ought to be exposed to that shame which they have not been careful to avoid, which they have brought on the profession, and which is a just punishment of their offences; and which, by coming to the church, they have made it impossible to avoid in one shape or other.

Doubtless there is a certain degree of secrecy necessary in cases of offence; and that degree is, by the law of Christ, limited to the several steps of private discipline, beyond which, secrecy is neither possible nor proper; unless in such cases as decency requires a veil to be drawn over it; or in such circumstances as publicity would expose to personal danger.

Farther, the secrecy of the churches, while engaged in discipline, has in many instances exposed the profession to public odium, and so operates as a powerful bar in the way of inquirers, in joining the churches. Hence the public are led to remark, "That there are surely some very uncommon secrets among them, which must

not be spoken, and that theirs is a curious discipline indeed, since all must be a profound secret." So they give way to conjecture and suspicion, and *sneer* at that ordinance, which, if they saw, would reach reproof and conviction to their minds. Now, I must confess, that in this the public are not to blame; for unnecessary secrecy is a just ground of suspicion and disgust; and, as observed above, none can suppose it necessary to conceal, uniformly, the exercise of a Christian duty, and a public ordinance of Christ's kingdom. Besides, there are other circumstances attending this concealment, which render it still more obnoxious: These are, the unfavourable accounts of cases which come to the public. Such things as are of an edifying nature are generally least exposed; whereas, those of a different nature, such as the separation of members, strifes, or divisions in churches, and the complaints of some who are put away, obtain sufficient currency. From such distorted representations, what idea can the public form but that which they generally express, "that they are a clashing quarrelsome pack," and the like; and the churches may lay their account that nothing can remove such odium, but the exposing of their discipline to public view; in which case they would be witnesses to themselves of the falsity of their present views of the nature of their proceedings.

The churches seem not to be aware of the concern they themselves have in the publicity of their discipline. This concern, however, is very great, as will appear from the following considerations; 1st, By this publicity they exhibit to the world what is their ornament and commendation, the ordinance of Christian discipline, which

is the highest proof they can exhibit to the world of their candour, sincerity, and purity. This exercise is a far greater proof of these, than any thing their lives can exhibit, and is the only consideration by which they can balance accounts with the world, on account of the sins among them, to which the world are witnesses, and have thereby a right to see removed. So that, in place of exposing the churches, as you seem to dread, the public discussion of discipline would lead the world to esteem and magnify the churches. This was eminently the effect of discipline in the case of Ananias and Sapphira his wife; (Acts v.) and you know this was the first case of discipline exhibited in the churches, and it was exhibited openly, before the unbelieving and persecuting Jews, in *Solomon's Porch*, in the temple, (ver. 1—15.) On that occasion it is said, "That great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things, and to the rest who were present, durst no man join himself; *but the people magnified the church*, and believers were *the more* added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." These, my friends, were happy effects, indeed, to have been produced by the exhibition of an awful case of discipline. And as discipline is the same, and calculated to produce the same effects still, why do we not perceive these effects, in some degree now, but because our discipline is concealed from public view, and because what men neither see nor hear, does not affect them? This example, however, which was doubtless so intended, should teach us how public discipline ought to be exposed as a general blessing, both to the churches, the parties, and to the world. Let us then con-

ceal it no longer. *2dly*, But not only the commendation of the profession, and of the churches, is concerned in the publicity of discipline, but, in some respects, their peace and safety are involved. I could venture to say, that many imprudencies and improprieties in the conduct of members would receive a complete check from the public presence, which they would not hesitate to exhibit among themselves, when concealed from observation, and you are not to learn what mischiefs, at times, result from such liberties. And farther, such an evil temper as partiality could not appear in the public presence; and who can calculate the advantages to be derived from this expedient, as every member would then act his part when urged to it, with decency and Christian dignity, and the church would appear in a serious, solemn, and respectable light to the world. *3dly*, The public discussion of discipline would remove every ground of suspicion, in respect to the proceedings of churches, or to occurrences taking place among them. With these, all the prejudices and objections, on the account of their discipline, would vanish. And of what importance are such consequences? You are not ignorant how vigilant the world is in watching the conduct of both churches and individuals, and improving every occasion or appearance against them, and in putting the most unfavourable construction upon them. How necessary is it, then, for the churches to remove every such occasion, though innocent, and every such ground of suspicion.

To illustrate what I mean, I shall state a case, which, at least, is possible. For instance, you know that Ananias and Sapphira both expired in the